DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 964 UD 018 484

AUTHOR Shyne, Ann W.; Schroeder, Anita G.
TITLE National Study of Social Services to Children and Their Families. Overview.
SPONS AGENCY National Center for Child Advocacy (DHEW/OHD), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Mar 78
CONTRACT 105-76-1127
NOTE 32p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Agency Role; Childhood Needs; *Children; *Child Welfare; Community Agencies (Public); Demography; Family Background; *National Surveys; Neglected Children; *Participant Characteristics; Social Services

ABSTRACT

In 1976, a survey was undertaken to answer a number of questions about public social service programs for children and their families. A representative sample of 315 public social service departments throughout the United States was selected to participate in the survey. Case by case data were requested on samples of the children being served by each participating agency at the end of March 1977. A total of 9,597 children were surveyed. This report presents preliminary estimates on the characteristics of the children and their families and on the services they received, and includes: (1) demographic and social characteristics of the sample; (2) living arrangements and family circumstances of the sample; (3) how the children were introduced to the agency; (4) sources of referral for children receiving social services from public agencies; (5) most frequently cited primary reasons for receiving social services; (6) agency service plans and activities; and (7) agency staff. (Author/AM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED157964

NATIONAL STUDY OF SOCIAL SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES
OVERVIEW

Ann W. Shyne, Ph.D.
Anita G. Schroeder, Ph.D.

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Westat, Inc.
11600 Nebel Street
Rockville, Maryland 20852

March 1978

UD018484

Prepared for:

National Center for Child Advocacy
United States Children's Bureau
Administration on Children, Youth, and Families
Office of Human Development Services
United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

This publication is based upon work performed under contract number HEW-105-76-1127.

FOREWORD

Who are the children receiving social services? Why have they been referred to social service agencies? What social services are they and their families receiving?

These are the questions the United States Children's Bureau sought to answer through a comprehensive national survey in which data were collected for one out of every two hundred children receiving services.

The information obtained in the survey will serve as the basis for critical policy decisions designed to improve the child welfare delivery system.

This overview report presents some of the highlights of the national survey. A more extensive and detailed report on the findings will be published later this year. In addition, separate reports on agency recruitment, information needs, and survey methodology will also be available on request.

We wish to express our appreciation to the many State and local public social service agencies which contributed their own time and effort in gathering the necessary data. Without their cooperation and active participation, this effort could not have been possible.

Helen V. Howerton
Chief
National Center for
Child Advocacy
Children's Bureau

Frank Ferro
Associate Chief
Children's Bureau

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.	1
DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS.	3
LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES. . . .	8
INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENCY.	14
AGENCY SERVICE PLANS AND ACTIVITIES	20
AGENCY STAFF.	25

TABLES

Table		Page
1	Age of children receiving social services from public agencies.	4
2	Age of children receiving social services from public agencies by living arrangement.	10
3	Length of time children receiving social services were known to agency	14
4	Most frequently cited primary reasons for receiving social services	17
5	Most important reason for receiving social services.	18

CHARTS

Chart		Page
1	Sex of children receiving social services from public agencies.	3

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

Charts		Page
2	Race or ethnic origin of children receiving social services from public agencies.	5
3	Educational status of children receiving social services from public agencies.	7
4	Living arrangement of children receiving social services from public agencies.	9
5	Principal child-caring person (PCCP) of children receiving social services from public agencies	11
6	Marital status of parents of children receiving social services from public agencies.	12
7	Sources of income for families of children receiving social services from public agencies.	13
8	Source of referral for children receiving social services from public agencies - comparison of 1961 and 1977 findings.	15
9	Most frequently cited service plan goals for children receiving social services from public agencies	20
10	Most frequently cited social services being provided to children by public agencies	21
11	Most frequently cited social services being provided to the principal child-caring person (PCCP) by public agencies.	22
12	Social services provided directly, purchased, or referred by public agencies.	23
13	Education of caseworkers assigned to children receiving social services from public agencies.	25
14	Experience of caseworkers assigned to children receiving social services from public agencies.	26

INTRODUCTION

At the end of March 1977, public agencies were providing social service to 1.8 million children, or 27 of every 1,000 children under 18 years of age in the United States. Two-thirds of these children were living with parents or relatives, but over half a million were in foster care, and 100,000 of these had been in foster care for at least six years. Neglect was the most common of the many and diverse reasons for service. These are a few of the important findings of a survey of the clientele and services of public agencies offering social services to children and their families.

The most recent prior survey of services to children throughout the nation was the Children's Bureau study of child welfare agencies in 1961.[1] A great many major changes have occurred since 1961 in the organization, funding, and emphases of public social services for children and their families. Most of these modifications were made with the purpose of extending and improving services, especially for children living with their own families, so that the need for placement of children away from home could be substantially reduced. Developments have included:

- Greater federal participation in the cost of services;
- Use of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) funds for foster care maintenance payments for children from families eligible for public assistance;
- Separation of the provision of social services and of assistance payments;
- Integration of services for child welfare and AFDC cases;
- Expanded eligibility for public social services up to a $2.5 billion ceiling on federal expenditures for services set in 1973;
- Strengthening of protective services for children who are neglected or abused, together with heightened popular concern about the abused child;

---

[1] Helen R. Jeter, Children, Problems, and Services in Child Welfare Programs, U.S. Children's Bureau, 1963.

- Expansion of the concept of the adoptable child to include many children who, because of age, race, or physical or mental handicaps, would in the past have grown up in foster families or institutions;

- Emphasis on deinstitutionalization, especially of dependent, neglected, mentally retarded, and delinquent children;

- Efforts to divert status offenders from the juvenile justice system to the child welfare system;

- Expansion of the purchase of service by public agencies from voluntary and proprietary agencies; and

- Increased emphasis on comprehensive emergency services.

All too little is known of the effect of these and other changes on the number and characteristics of the recipients of public social services and on the services they receive. This survey was planned by the National Center for Child Advocacy of the United States Children's Bureau to answer a number of questions about public social service programs for children and their families. How many children receive service? Who are the children and their families? Why do they come to agencies? What services do they receive? Answers to these questions are of the utmost importance to administrators, policy makers, and legislators, but only a few communities now have this information available.

To obtain current information about clientele and services, a representative sample of 315 public social service departments throughout the United States was selected to participate in the survey. Case-by-case data were requested on samples of the children being served by each participating agency at the end of March 1977. A total of 9,597 children was surveyed. This report presents preliminary estimates on the characteristics of the children and their families and on the services they received.[2]

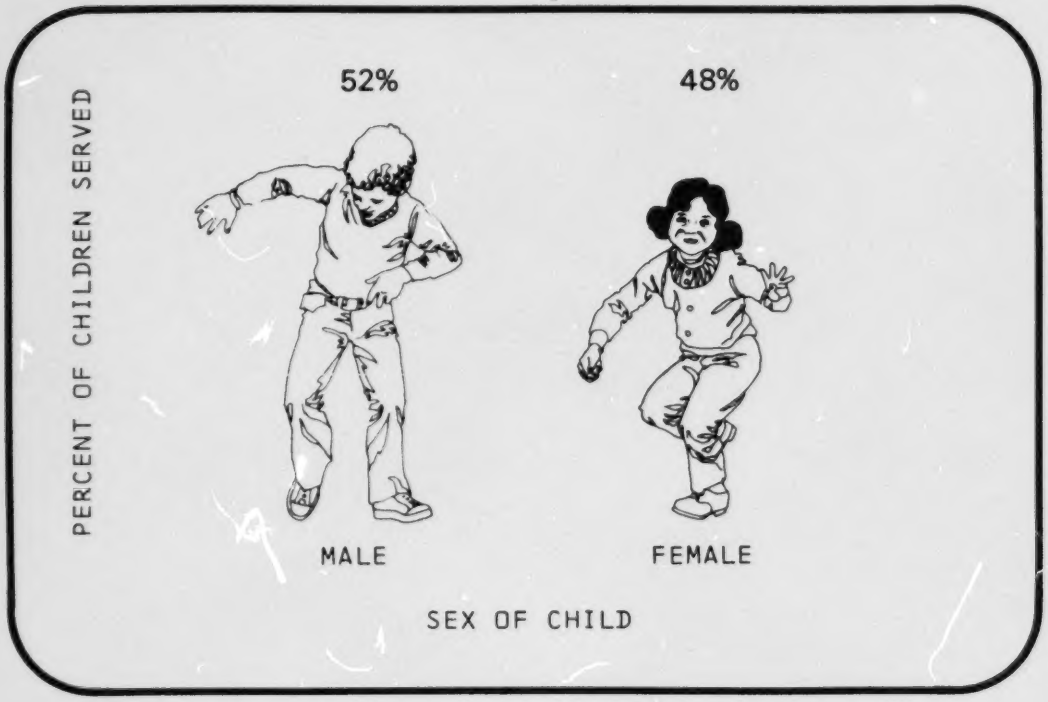
---

[2]A full report is in preparation and will be available in mid 1978.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

As in 1961, boys composed a slight majority -- 52 percent -- of the children served in 1977 (Chart 1). The median age of the children in 1977 was 9.2 years, compared to the 1961 median of 9.9.[3] There are approximately 83,000 infants, 609,000 children between 1 and 6 years of age, 341,000 children between 7 and 10, and 735,000 children 11 or older. The age distribution paralleled that of the United States population as of July 1, 1976 (Table 1).

Chart 1. Sex of children receiving social services from public agencies



[3]This median was computed from data in the Jeter report, excluding children 18 years and older.

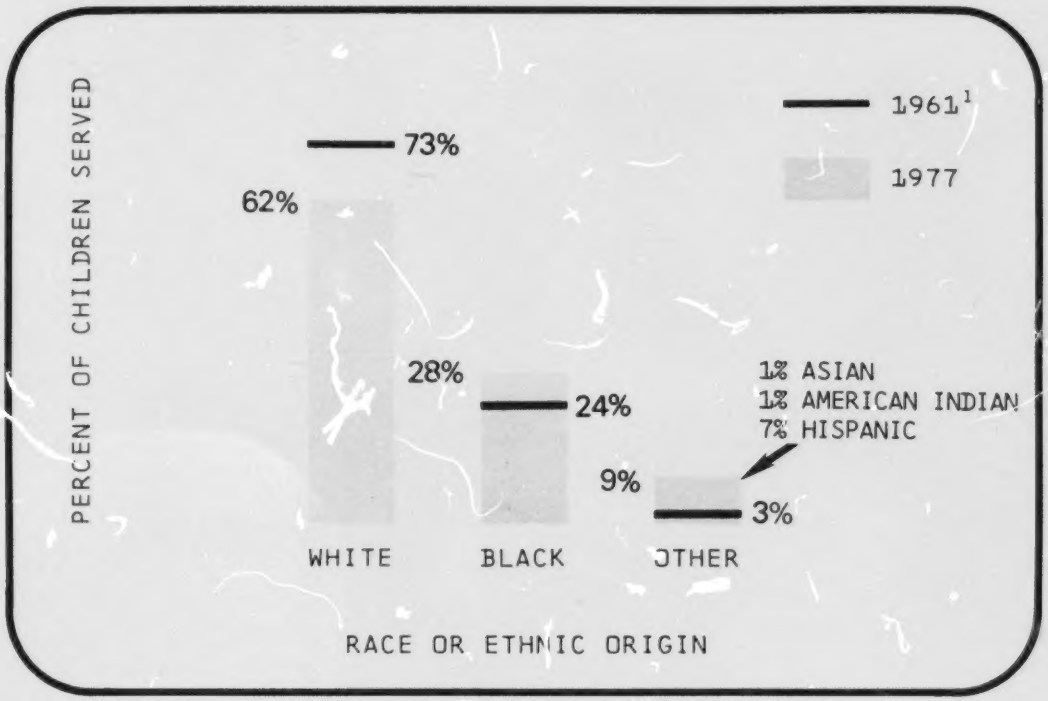
Table 1. Age of children receiving social services from public agencies

Age	Survey population (1977)		Total U.S. population, 1976
	Number (thousands)	Percent[1]	Percent[1]
Under 1 year	83	5	5
1-3 years	283	16	14
4-6 years	326	18	16
7-10 years	341	19	22
11-14 years	398	22	25
15-17 years	337	19	19
Total	1,768	100	100

[1]Percents will vary slightly due to rounding.

Of the children whose race was identified in the current study, 62 percent were white, 28 percent black, 7 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent each Asian-Pacific and Indian-Alaskan. The figures for the 1961 study were 73 percent white, 24 percent black, and only 3 percent of any other race (Chart 2). Thus, there was some increase in the black proportion. The emergence of a distinct Hispanic clientele of 120,000, a group not separately identified in 1961, is also apparent. The median ages were: black - 8.2 years, white - 9.8 years, and Hispanic - 9.9 years.

Chart 2. Race or ethnic origin of children receiving social services from public agencies

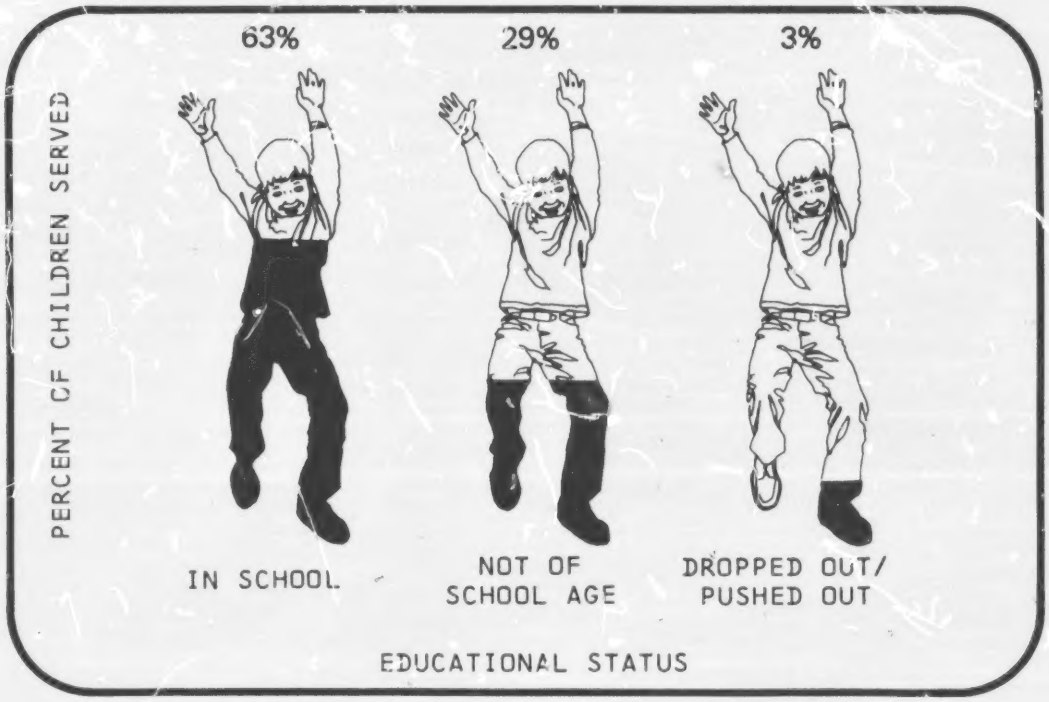


Source: [1]Children, Problems, and Services in Child Welfare Programs, 1961

Nearly a third of the children (29 percent) were reported as "not of school age," although some very young children were in preschool programs. Most of the rest (63 percent) were in school, including 109,000 children in special education or ungraded classes (Chart 3). The remaining 5 percent were almost evenly divided between those who had dropped out or been pushed out (45,000), and those not attending for other reasons (47,000). The percentages of various age groups attending school were:

Age	Percent in school
Under 4 years	3
4-6 years	43
7-10 years	96
11-14 years	94
15-17 years	79

Chart 3. Educational status of children receiving social services from public agencies



LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

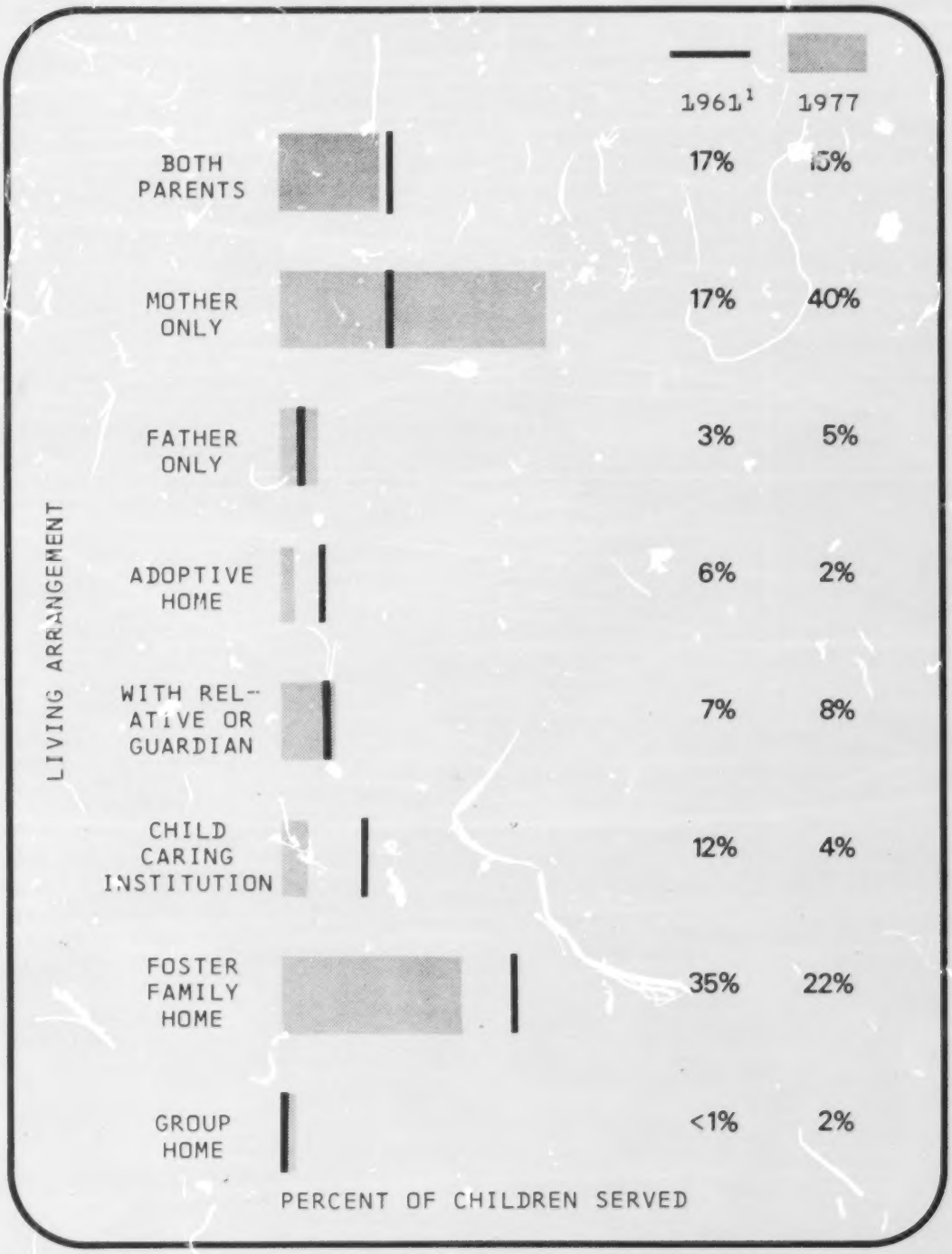
The difference in living arrangements for the children served in 1961 and 1977 highlights the difference in the coverage of the two surveys. The 1961 survey did not include service to children in AFDC families unless the children were served by child welfare units. The 1977 survey included all children who were receiving services from a specialized child welfare unit or a unit serving children and families. In 1977 well over one million of the children served lived with one or both parents -- 60 percent, compared with 37 percent in 1961. The largest single group was 40 percent living with the mother only (Chart 4). The proportions living with both parents and with father only were 15 percent and 5 percent, respectively. The proportion of children served who lived with other relatives was 8 percent.

Conversely, the percentage of children in foster care decreased from 47 percent in 1961 to 28 percent in 1977. The main component of the foster care population, children in foster family homes, dropped from 35 percent to 22 percent. The decline in the institutional segment was even steeper, from 12 percent to 4 percent. The decline in the percentage of children in foster care should not be confused with a decrease in actual numbers. The 28 percent in foster care in 1977 represented 500,000 children, nearly three times the number in foster care under the supervision of public agencies in 1961. The 22 percent in foster family homes number 395,000, compared with about 132,000 in 1961.

The relation of living arrangement to the child's age is shown in Table 2. The proportion of children living with parents decreases as age increases after age six, while the proportion living with relatives stays constant, and the proportion in foster care rises. Although children in adoptive homes are spread across the age groups, only in the under-one-year age group were more than 3 percent of the children in adoptive homes.

The parents or relatives responsible for the care of the children or the persons to whom they would return from foster care were described as the principal child-caring persons. For three-fourths of the children the mother occupied this role of principal child-caring person, for 8 percent it was the father, and for 6 percent another relative. Eight percent of the children had no principal child-caring person (Chart 5). Just over a third of the principal child-caring persons were employed, usually full time. A like proportion were not in the labor force, and a little less than a third were unemployed.

Chart 4. Living arrangement of children receiving social services from public agencies



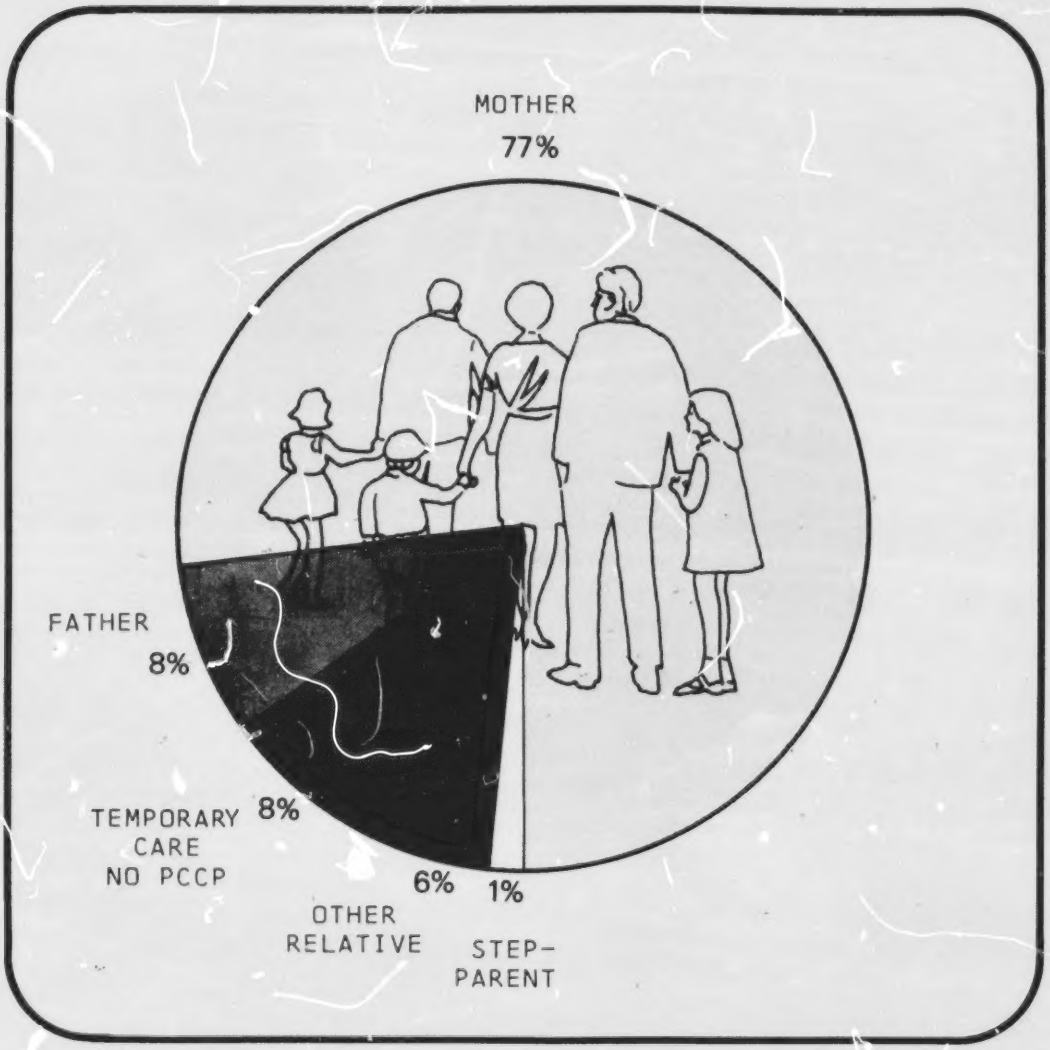
Source: [1]Children, Problems, and Services in Child Welfare Programs, 1961.

Table 2. Age of children receiving social services from public agencies by living arrangement

Living arrangement	Median age (years)	Percent of children in each age category						
		Total	Under 1 year	1-3 years	4-6 years	7-10 years	11-14 years	15-17 years
With parent(s)	7.7	60	64	72	72	61	49	46
With relative(s)	10.4	8	8	7	7	8	8	10
In adoptive home	5.6	2	9	3	2	3	1	*
In foster care	11.7	28	17	18	19	28	39	36
Elsewhere	15.8	2	1	*	*	*	2	7
Total		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Less than 0.5 percent

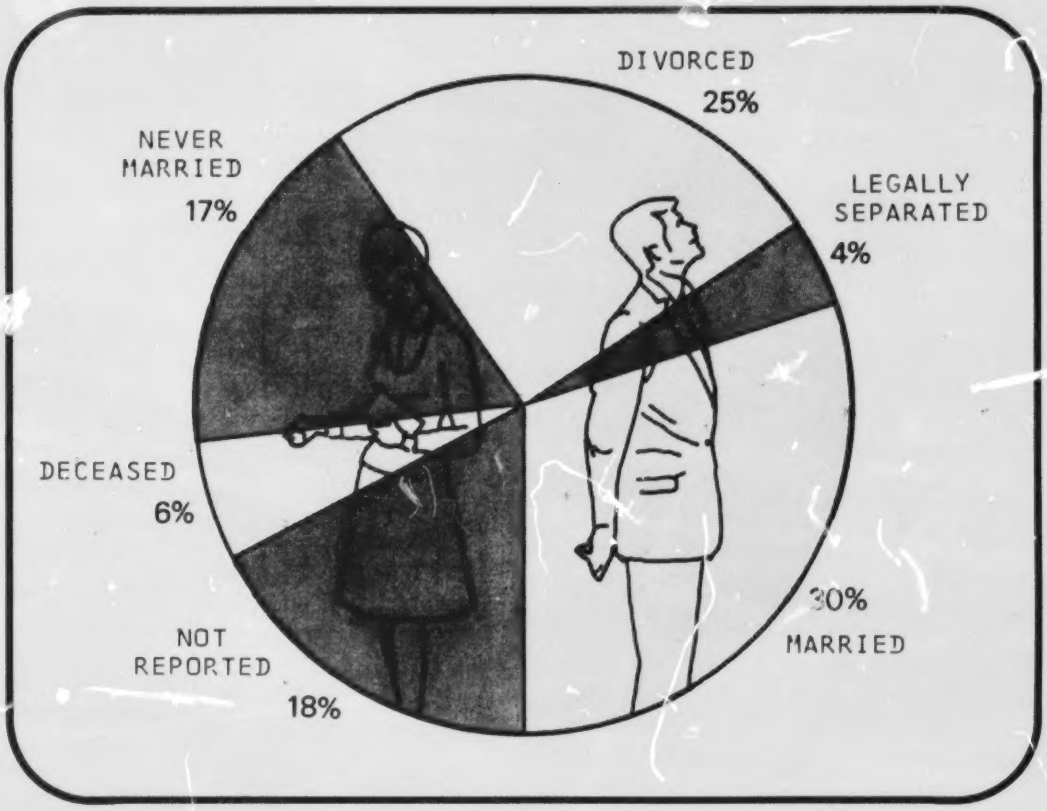
Chart 5. Principal child-caring person (PCCP) of children receiving social services from public agencies



Information was obtained on the marital status of the parents of 82 percent of the children. Thirty-five percent had been previously married but the marriage had been broken, usually by divorce (25 percent) or separation (4 percent), rather than by death (6 percent) (Chart 6). The parents of 30 percent of the children being served were currently married, and two out of three of these married couples were living together. The parents of 17 percent of the children had never been married to each other, and very few of these couples lived together. Only 22 percent of the children had parents who were living together.[4]

Parents had the legal custody of 65 percent of the children. Most of the others (30 percent) were in the custody of an agency, usually by court order.

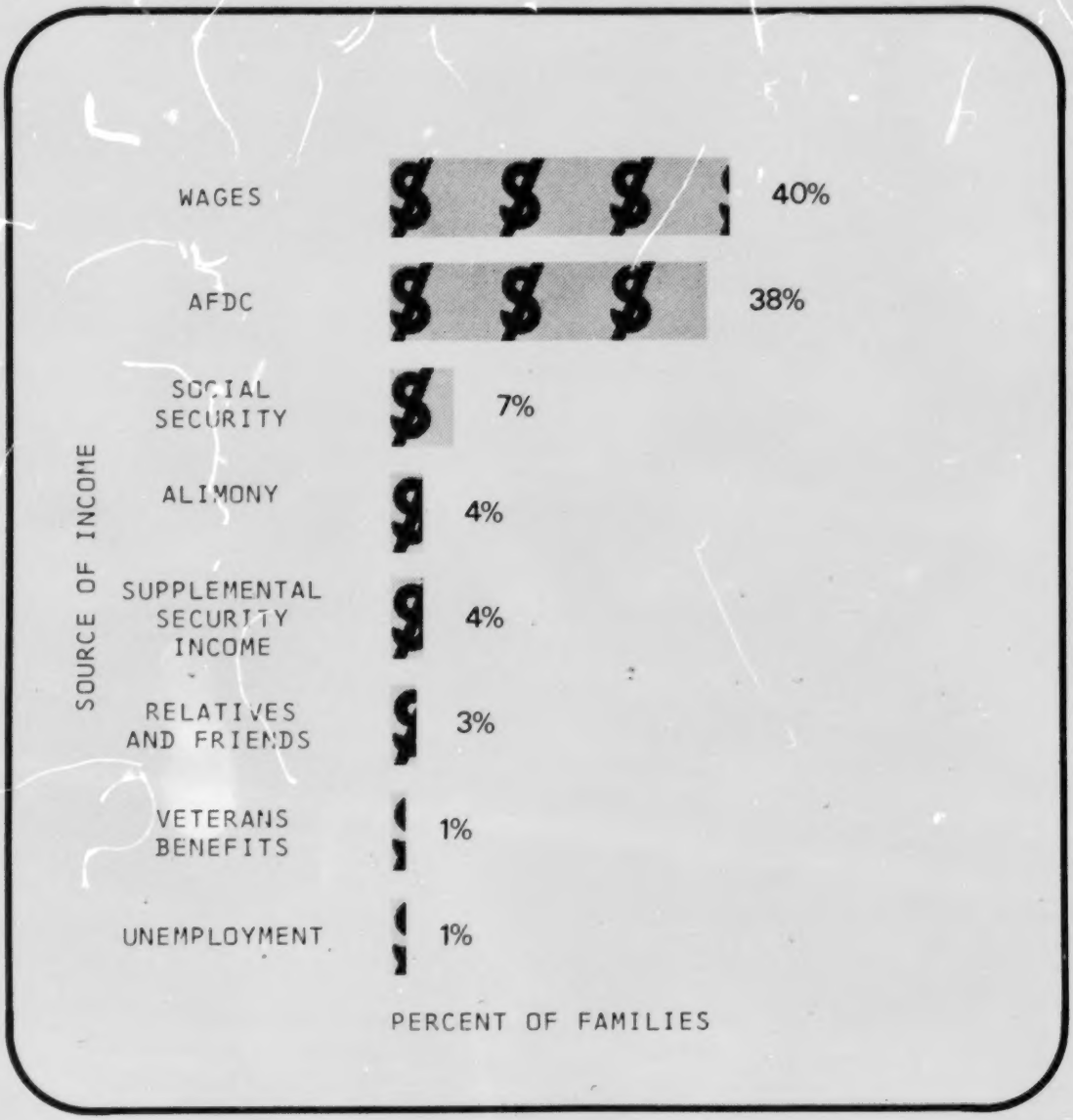
Chart 6. Marital status of parents of children receiving social services from public agencies



[4]Note that 15 percent of the children lived with both parents, but that 22 percent of the children had parents living together, whether the child lived at home or not.

Wages and AFDC were about equally often reported as a main source of family support -- for 722,000 children or 40 percent, wages were a main source of support, and for 670,000 or 38 percent, AFDC (Chart 7). Social Security ranked third, but it was a major source of income for only 117,000 or 7 percent. The 1977 AFDC percentage (38) was more than twice that of the 18 percent reported in 1961. This may be due to the difference in sampling.

Chart 7. Sources of income for families of children receiving social services from public agencies



INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENCY

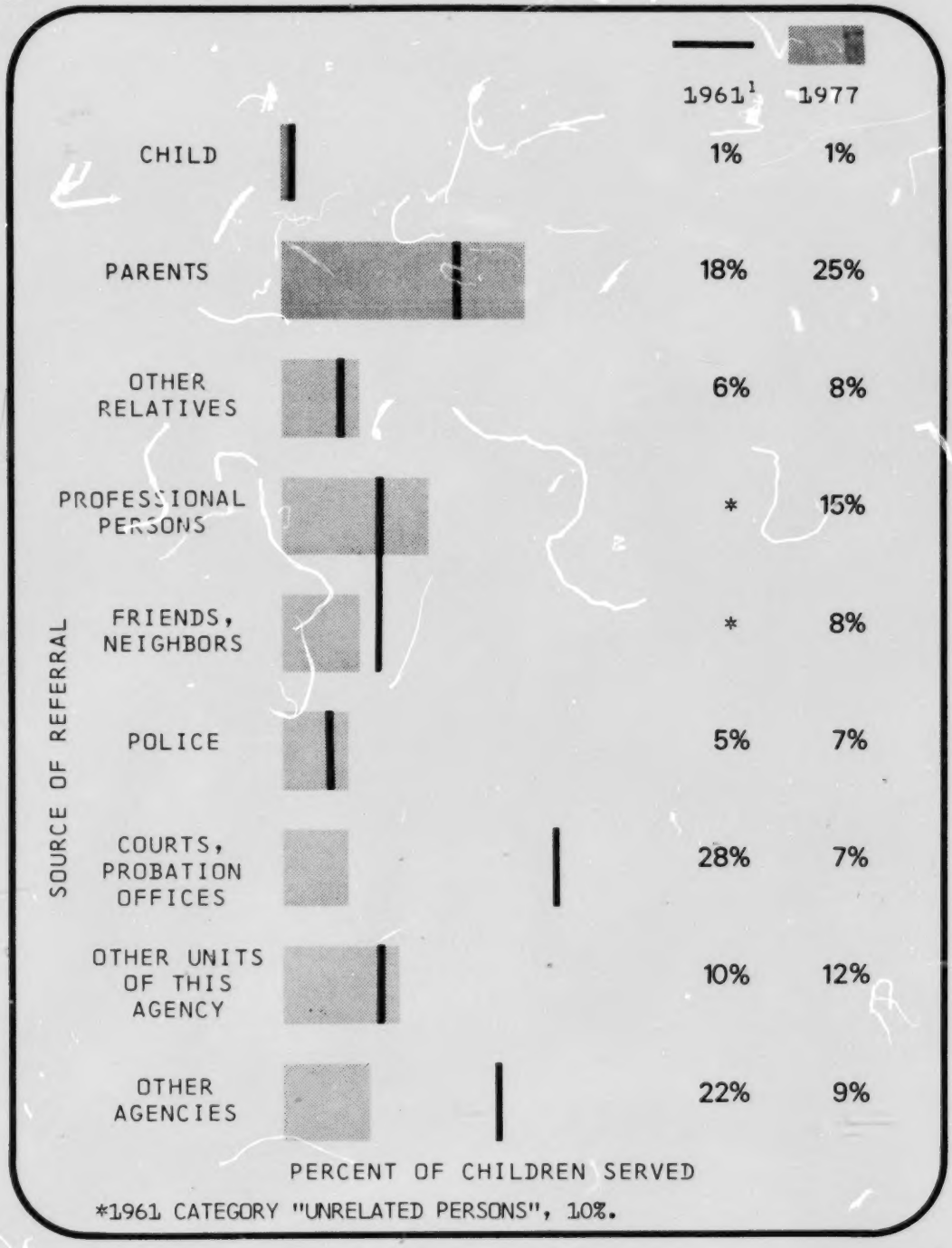
How long had the children been known to the agency? At one extreme are 21 percent or about 368,000 children who had first come to agency attention within the last six months, and at the other are 24 percent or over 422,000 children introduced to the agency four or more years earlier (Table 3). The time lapse from the first contact to the survey date was shorter for the children in the current survey than for those studied in 1961. Over a third of the 1977 group (35 percent) had been known to the agency less than one year, compared with 15 percent in 1961, while the percentages known four years or longer were 24 percent in 1977 and 34 percent in 1961.

Data on sources of referral show a marked shift from formal or official sources in 1961 to informal or personal sources in 1977 (Chart 8). Parents referred 25 percent of the children served in 1977, compared with 18 percent of the 1961 study population. Professional persons, such as teachers, doctors, attorneys, and clergy, ranked second with 15 percent. Referrals from other units of the agency accounted for 12 percent, only slightly higher than in 1961. On the other hand, only 9 percent of the children had been referred by other agencies in 1977, and 7 percent by courts and probation offices, sharp reductions from the figures of 22 percent and 28 percent, respectively, in the earlier study.

Table 3. Length of time children receiving social services were known to the agency

Length of time known to agency	Percent of children
Less than 6 months	21
6 - 11 months	14
One but less than two years	18
Two but less than three years	12
Three but less than four years	7
Four years or more	24

Chart 8. Source of referral for children receiving social services from public agencies - comparison of 1961 and 1977 findings



Source: [1]Children, Problems, and Services in Child Welfare Programs, 1961.

Most of the children and their families brought multiple problems to the agency, about three problems per case on the average. The most important reasons children were receiving service in 1977 were widely diversified. Of the 33 reasons on the questionnaire, the eight reasons indicated most frequently are given in Table 4.

Some of the problems of greatest popular concern, such as teenage pregnancy, status offenders, and drug addiction, were relatively infrequent. Thus, these problems are not being brought to the public agencies as primary reasons for service, and this finding may indicate a failure by the agencies to reach the children affected. For example, although one million teenagers a year become pregnant, less than 20,000 of the children served by public social service agencies presented this problem. Table 5 shows the percentage of cases in which each problem was given as the one most important reason for the child's receipt of service in March 1977.

Because of the difference in the classification used in the 1961 and 1977 surveys, comparison of the incidence of major reasons is difficult. Without doubt the combined category of neglect, abuse, and exploitation headed the list in both years, but the percentage was substantially lower in 1977. The percentage of children being served because of a parent's illness, the child's physical handicap, or the child's mental retardation was also lower in 1977. The relative incidence of emotional or behavioral problems in the child appears to have remained the same. Financial need also occurred as the major reason for services with equal frequency -- 5 percent of the cases -- in both years.

Table 4. Most frequently cited primary reasons for receiving social services

Reason	1977 Percent	1961[1] Percent
Neglect of child	15	36
Abuse of child	7	
Financial need	5	5
Emotional problems of parent	4	*
Emotional problems of child	4	9
Conflict in parent/ child relationship	4	5
Abandonment of child	3	*
Unwillingness to care for child	3	*

*No figure given

Source: [1]Children, Problems, and Services in Child Welfare Programs, 1961

Table 5. Most important reason for receiving social services

Reason	Percent of cases	Reason	Percent of cases
Child Reasons		Family Reasons	
Child of teenage mother	0.7	Abandonment of child	2.8
Difficulty in adjustment on return from foster care	1.2	Alcoholism of father	0.5
		Alcoholism of mother	1.3
Emotional or behavioral problems		Conflict in parent/child relationship	4.0
Alcoholism	*	Drug addiction of father	*
Community behavior	*	Drug addiction of mother	*
Delinquency	1.7	Emotional problem of parent	4.3
Drug addiction	*	Mental illness of parent	1.7
Emotional problems	4.2	Mental retardation of parent	0.7
Home behavior	2.0	Neglect, abuse, exploitation	
Prostitution	*	Neglect	15.0
School behavior	1.5	Abuse	6.5
Status offender	1.8	Exploitation	*
Mental retardation	1.7	Parent arrested, in prison	0.8
Physical handicap	1.3	Physical illness of parent	1.4
Physical illness	0.9	Prostitution of mother	*
Teenage pregnancy	0.6	Unwillingness to care for child	2.8
Environmental Circumstances		Other	22.1
Financial need	4.5		
Inadequate housing	1.2		

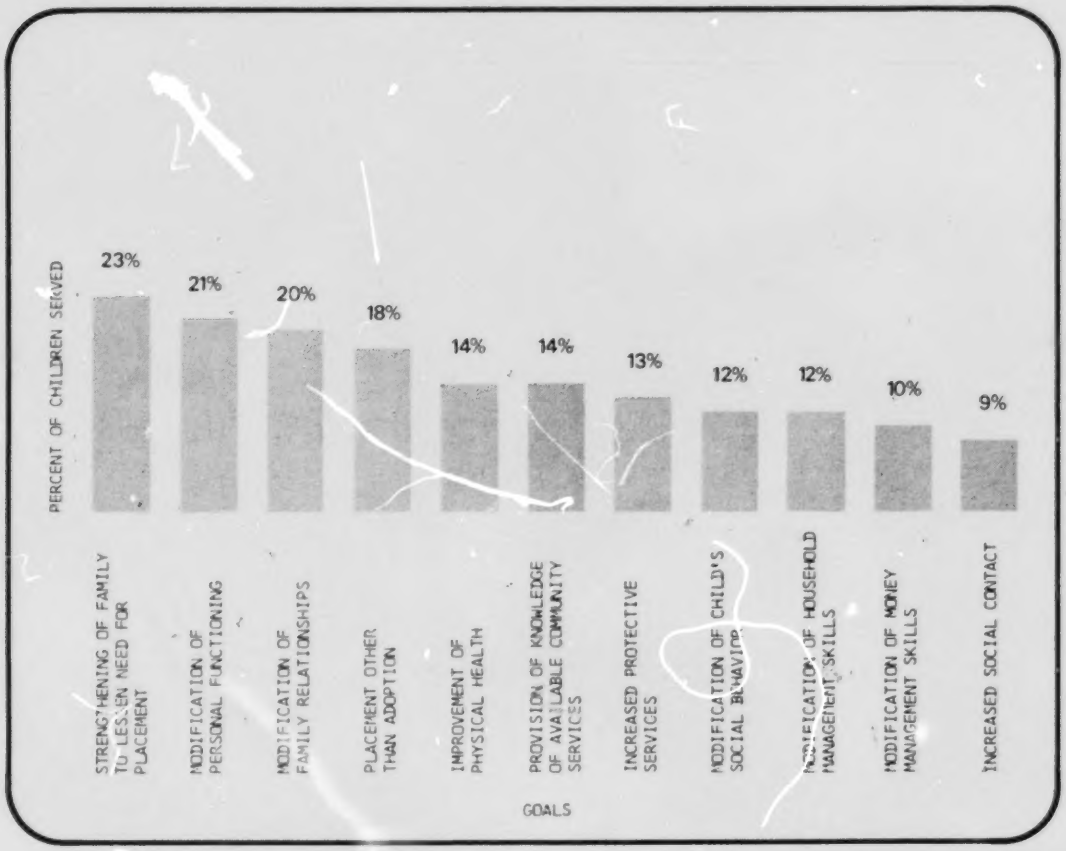
*Less than 0.5 percent

If one were to try to conjure up, and this phrase is used advisedly, a picture of the typical child receiving services in March 1977, it would look something like this -- a white school girl or boy about nine years eight months old, living with his or her mother. The mother was previously married to the child's father, but is now divorced or separated from him. This household is likely to be supported by AFDC payments or by the mother's earnings. The child probably came to the attention of the agency within the past two years, because of parental neglect or because of emotional problems in parent or child, or conflict between them. The trouble with this composite picture is the large proportion of children it does not fit -- the many living in foster homes or with both parents, the many preschoolers and adolescents, the substantial numbers of black and Hispanic children, and the many being served because of financial need or parental unwillingness to care for the child.

AGENCY SERVICE PLANS AND ACTIVITIES

The case records of about two-thirds of the children included service plans, usually written or revised in 1976 or 1977. Service plans were less common for children living with one or both parents than for other children. Most of the plans included service goals for the child (80 percent), (Chart 9), and many included such goals for the family (64 percent). Usually multiple goals were set, just over three, on the average, for cases with any specified goals. The three goals most frequently reported were "strengthening the family to lessen the need for placement of children" (23 percent of all cases), "modification of personal functioning/mental health" (21 percent), and "modification of family relationships" (20 percent). These goals, which imply change in feelings, attitudes, and relationships, were much more often articulated than were goals with respect to such practical skills as household management, money management, or use of community resources.

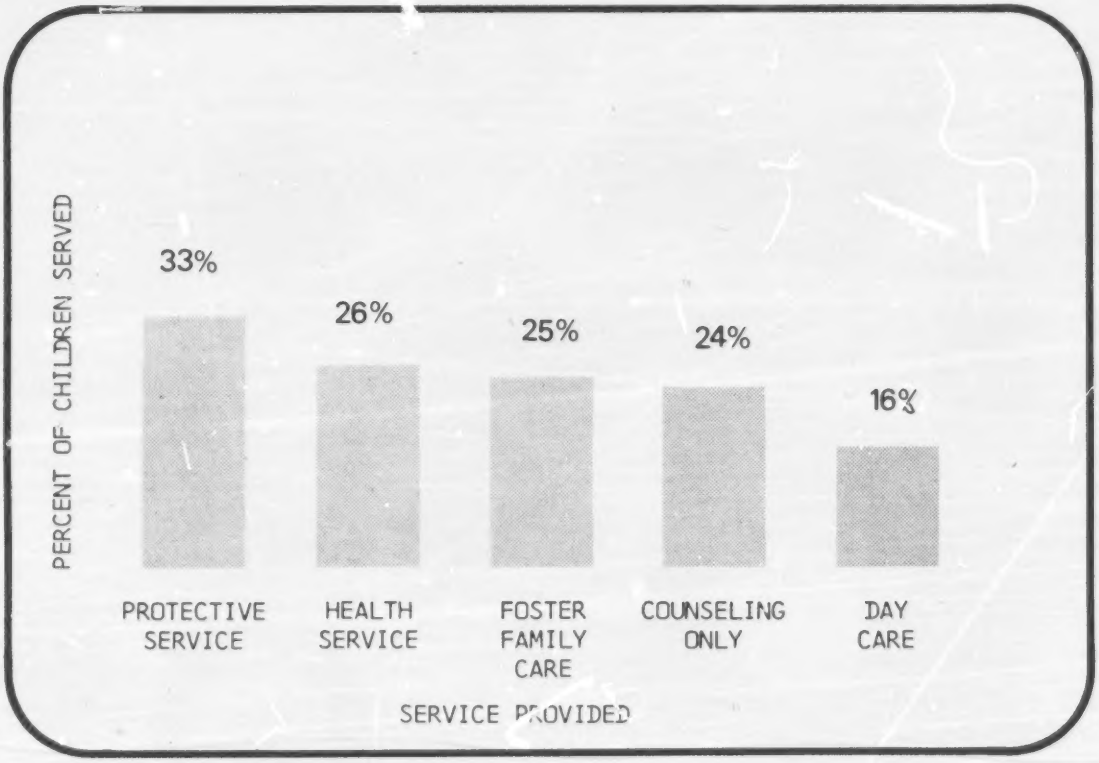
Chart 9. Most frequently cited service plans goals for children receiving social services from public agencies



Helping the child to become part of a new family through adoption was seen as an appropriate objective in a relatively small fraction of cases; freeing the child for adoption and placement in an adoptive home were each stated as a goal for about 4 percent of the 1.8 million cases. Placement other than adoptive placement was a goal in 18 percent of the cases, very close in frequency to the top three goals mentioned above, a reflection of the common tendency to regard placement of the child as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end.

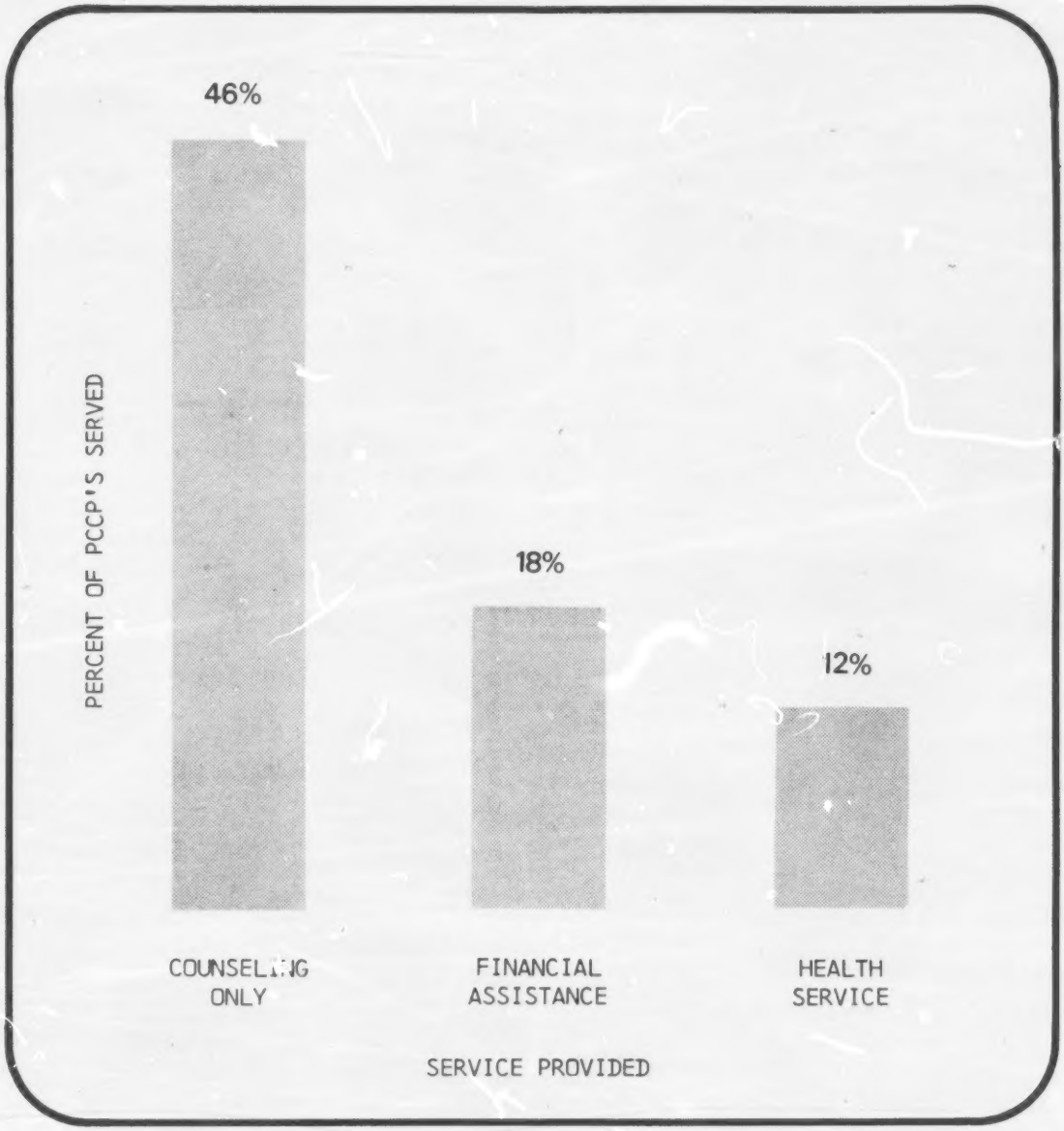
In view of the frequency of neglect or abuse as the most important problem it is hardly surprising that protective service (which includes identification and investigation as well as treatment) led the list of services provided to children, with 33 percent of the children receiving this service (Chart 10). The other services given to at least 10 percent of the children were: health service - 26 percent, foster family care - 25 percent, counseling (not as part of another specific service) - 24 percent, day care - 16 percent, transportation - 11 percent, educational service - 11 percent, and mental health service - 10 percent.

Chart 10. Most frequently cited social services being provided to children by public agencies



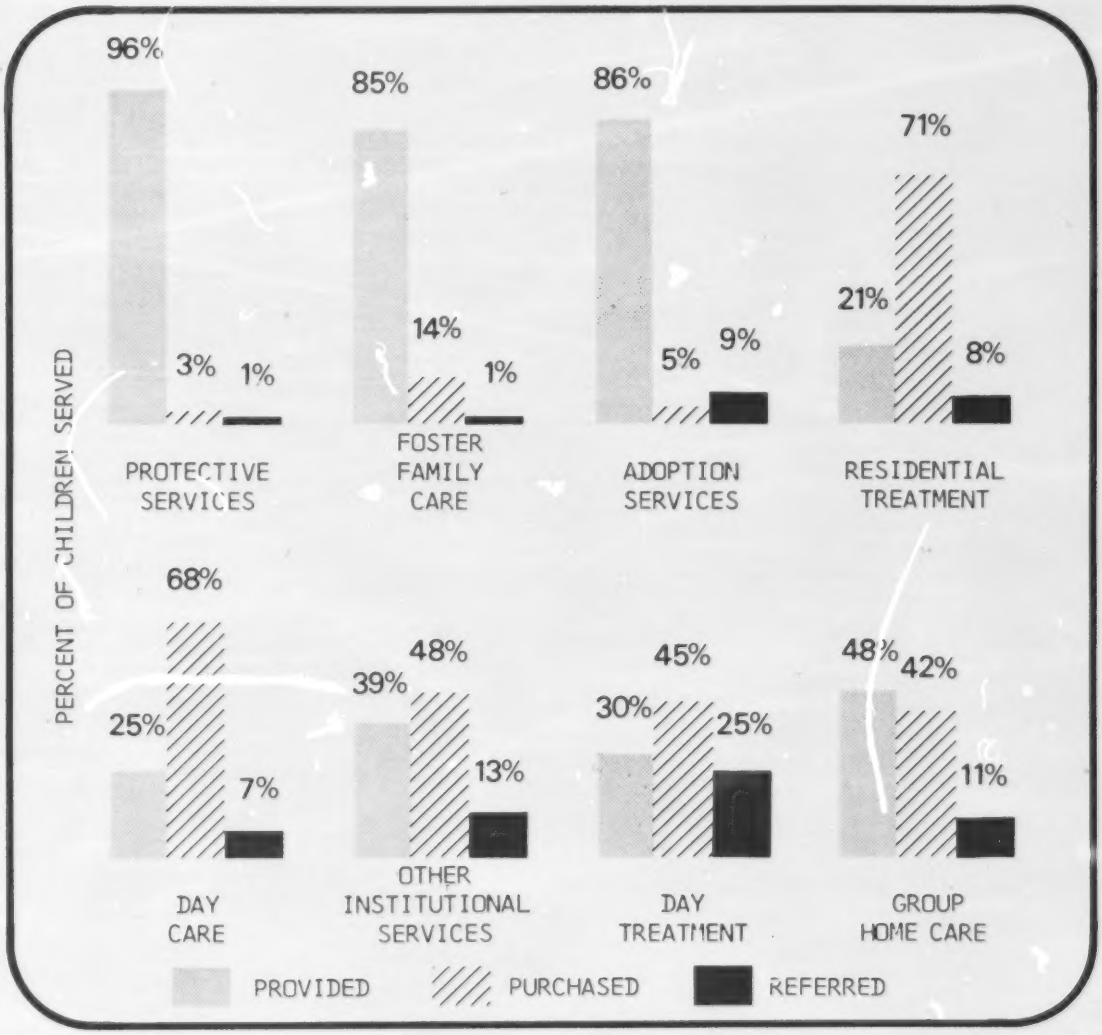
Counseling was given to the principal child-caring person (PCCP) for nearly half the children (46 percent) (Chart 11). Financial assistance ranked second (18 percent) among services to the PCCP, and health service ranked third (12 percent). Homemaker service was provided in only 7 percent of the cases.

Chart 11. Most frequently cited social services being provided to the principal child-caring person (PCCP) by public agencies



Protective services, foster family care, adoption, and counseling were provided directly by the public social service departments to more than 75 percent of the children who received these services (Chart 12). The departments relied heavily on purchase of service for five other basic child welfare services: residential treatment - 71 percent, day care - 68 percent, institutional services - 48 percent, day treatment - 45 percent, and group home care - 42 percent. For each of these services except day care, the service was purchased more often from a proprietary ("for-profit") agency than from a voluntary (non-profit) agency or another public agency; on day care the split was even. Educational, health, and mental health services were usually arranged through referral or through purchase from a public agency.

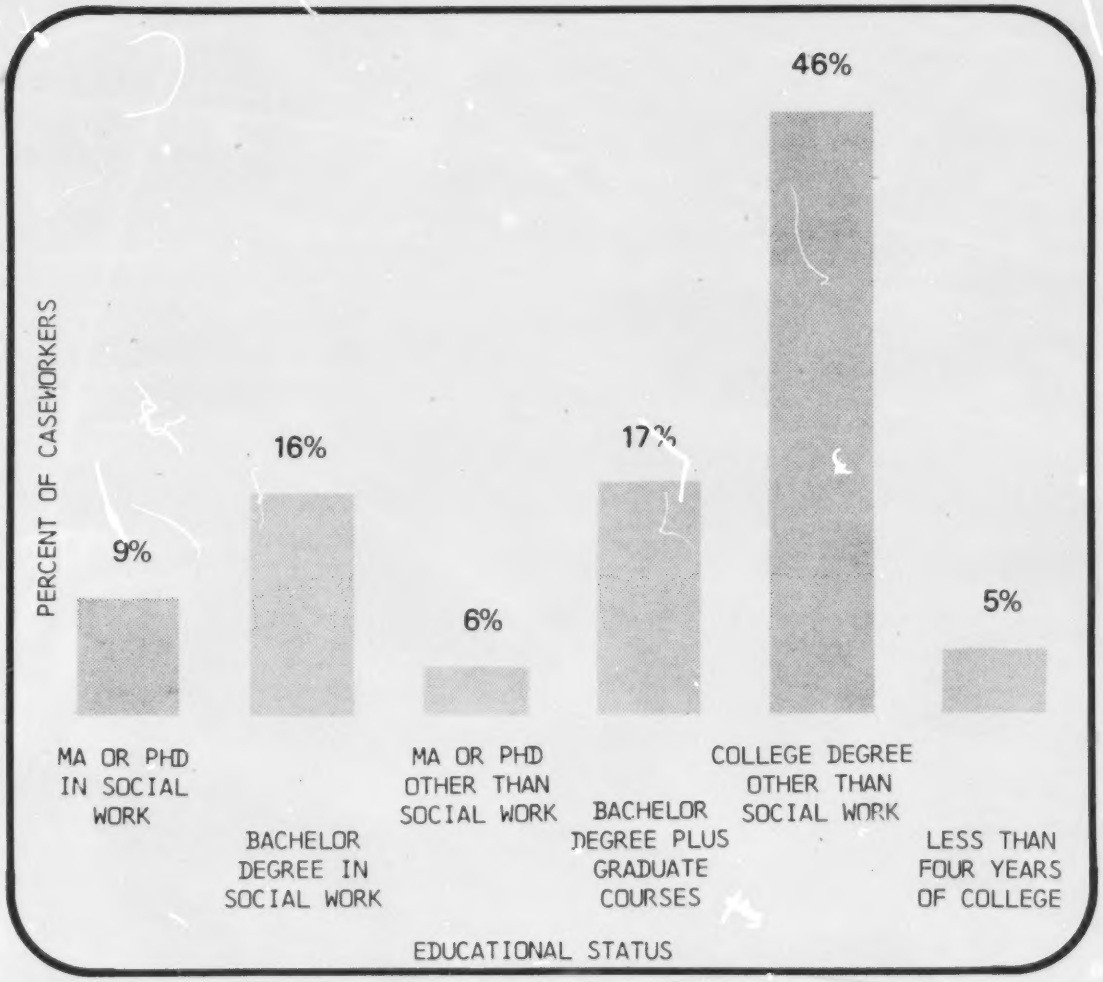
Chart 12. Social services provided directly, purchased, or referred by public agencies



The amount of contact between agency staff and the children and families being served is a matter of considerable interest, but it is not easy to determine from case records. Questions about contacts (face-to-face or by telephone) with the child, the principal child-caring person, and jointly with child and PCCP frequently elicited ambiguous answers. It appears that, for cases for which an entry was given on the questionnaire, there was no contact during the first three months of 1977 with 31 percent of the children and 18 percent of the PCCP's. At the other extreme are the cases in which there were three or more contacts with the child alone (17 percent), the PCCP alone (25 percent), and with child and PCCP (14 percent). For roughly a fourth of the cases, "regular" contact of each of the three types was reported.

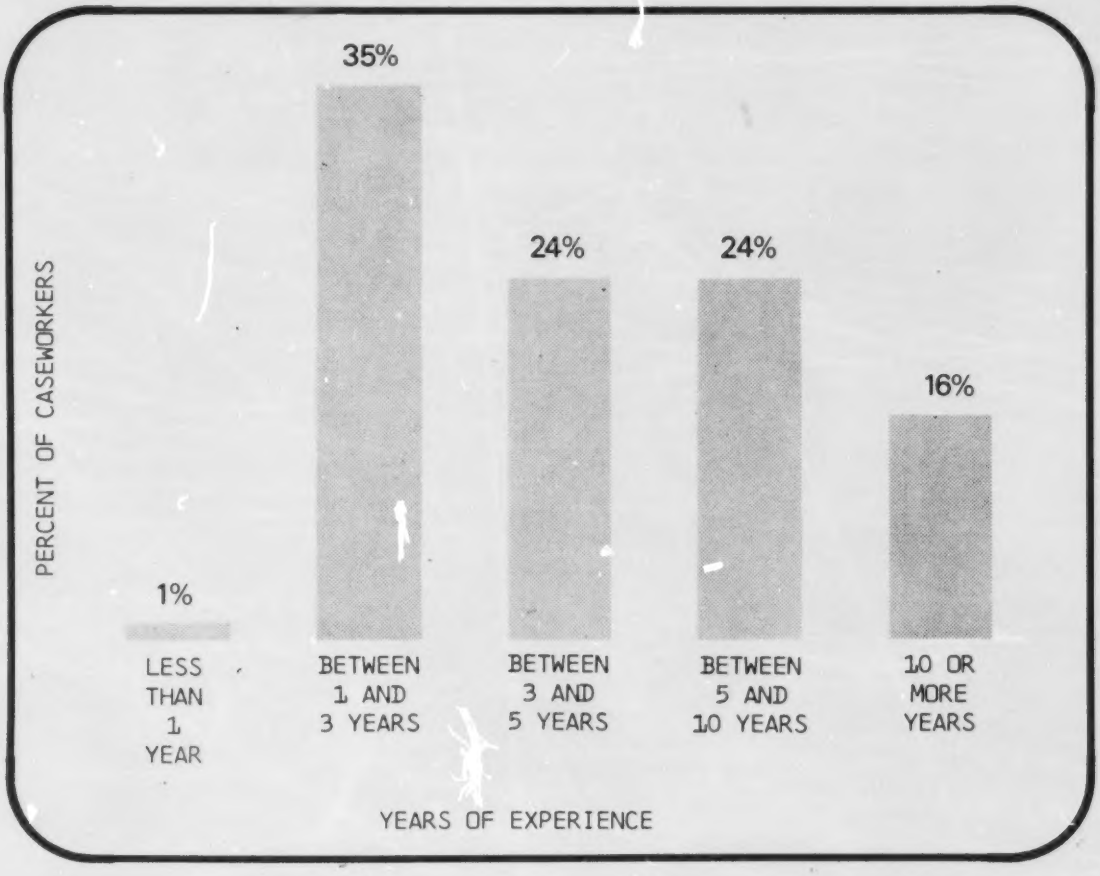
In view of the multiplicity of problems in the cases, the complexity of goals of service, and the responsiblity of the caseworker to deal with interpersonal as well as practical problems, the education and experience the workers brought to their tasks are important. About 80 percent of the children were assigned to caseworkers whose highest degree was a bachelor degree, with about one in five of these degrees in social work (Chart 13). Five percent were served by workers with less than a four-year college degree, while 9 percent had workers with graduate degrees in social work, and 6 percent were assigned to caseworkers with graduate degrees in other fields.

Chart 13. Education of caseworkers assigned to children receiving social services from public agencies



The caseworkers' experience in family and children's service varied widely (Chart 14). About a third (35 percent) of the cases were assigned to workers with one but less than three years of experience, while 24 percent had workers with three and under five years, and the same percentage were assigned to staff with five and under ten years of experience. At the extremes, 1 percent had workers in their first year of related experience, while 16 percent had workers with ten years or more of experience.

Chart 14. Experience of caseworkers assigned to children receiving social services from public agencies



When education and experience are taken together, the typical caseworker emerges as a person with a bachelor degree in a field other than social work and a little more than three years of experience in social service to children and families. Thus, the adequacy of the caseworker to meet the service needs and goals of the cases for which he or she is responsible is dependent upon the agencies providing in-service training and supervision of remarkable quality.